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We've Lost Art...

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Traducteur : Simon Pleasance



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RÉFÉRENCE

Baudrillard, Jean. *Pourquoi tout n'a-t-il pas déjà disparu ?*, Paris : L'Herne, 2007, (Cahiers)
Delacampagne, Christian. *Où est passé l'art ? : peinture, photographie et politique (1839-2007)*, Paris : Ed. du Panama, 2007, (Cyclo)

Leonelli, Ludovic. *La Séduction Baudrillard*, Paris : Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2007, (D'art en questions)

Moineau, Jean-Claude. *Contre l'art global : pour un art sans identité*, Maisons-Alfort : Ere, 2007
Les Arts de masse en question, Bruxelles : La Lettre volée, 2007, (Essais)

- 1 Contemporary art is still worrying philosophers. But the questions have shifted: as the “public” no longer really rejects this sort of production, people are no longer railing at the worthlessness of contemporary art, but at its dissolution and disappearance in the surge of imagery, globalization, mass art, and cultural leisure. This comes to more or less the same thing, but, in these corrective times, the verdict is more decent.
- 2 A raft of recent books offers a range of fairly consonant diagnoses.
- 3 Jean-Claude Moineau's book shrewdly lists many features of contemporary art: its identification with global culture, the de-differentiation of activities, the absence of critical distance, and the hyper-institutionalization of production. The avant-garde utopia has changed into a social masquerade and a form of tourist entertainment. In the best of cases, contemporary art is still one source of cultural supply among others, trying to safeguard its originality in the protected areas of museums and international events. The author is well aware of the comeback of identity quests within this banalization and this homogenization. One interesting chapter examines under what conditions criticism might be replaced by the documentary and ethnographic approach. Unfortunately, the reflections on what an art might be that sidesteps appropriation are more pious than anything else. Moineau talks to us about an art without artwork, without art, outside of

art, and without any artistic identity. Apart from one or two rare poetic gestures, like those of Francis Alÿs, this sort of encounter-art or micro-artistic art is widely practiced (and appropriated) in the form of dandyism, when not in the form of celebrity life styles.

- 4 Christian Delacampagne's book displays the same concerns, but in different terms: "Never has culture been in such good shape as in our present day and age. And never has creative art suffered more". Except that Delacampagne, who recently died, was still dreaming of Great Art. He contrasts the thriving entertainment culture with the sad fate of true creative artists abandoned by the institutional art world. In the straight line of hermeneutic tradition, he thus offers us a history of artistic revolutions to explain this outcome. He places it under the aegis of the quest for an ever more perfect representation of reality, up until the moment when photography enabled painting to venture into the formal sphere. We thus find the hackneyed history of a modern painting obsessed by the new and by abstraction. To which the inevitable Marcel Duchamp responds, leading us through a series of stages to "any old thing". Nor let us bombard a "holy history" which Delacampagne is not the first to recount.
- 5 We all remember the scandal caused by Jean Baudrillard's declaration in the 1990s that "contemporary art has had it". The publication of the short essay *Pourquoi tout n'a-t-il pas déjà disparu ?*, the death of the author himself and the publication of Ludovic Leonelli's excellent book offer us an opportunity to return to the Baudrillardian conception of art. If Baudrillard's final small tome barely presents anything novel in its crepuscular, nihilistic and rather skeptical assertion of a world in which everything is disappearing—images, thoughts, subject, art, and, last but not least, reality itself, Leonelli, in his admiring but unsmug book, clearly makes the point about the Baudrillardian vision of art. The disappearance of art, its nullification, is obviously the disappearance of a certain conception of art—its liberation from the rules of representation, with, in consequence, an infinity of possibilities, the on-going recycling of past and present, irony, kitsch, plagiarism, banality, ugliness, and simulation. The most interesting thing is not the reactionary observation, but the correlative perception in Baudrillard that aesthetics has shifted into the everyday, advertising, design, objects, bodies and fashion: "in this transaesthetic world, art no longer has a reserved seat" (Leonelli, p. 83). Leonelli forcefully suggests that Baudrillard's personal conception of art was, in the final analysis, modern—the conception of a "useless function" art, agent of the "symbolic murder of reality", power of transcendence and criticism.
- 6 Certain eminent philosophers of art got together at Vouillé in 2005 to thrash out the issue of mass art. They too were well aware of the contemporary situation, challenging this teetering of the aesthetic field and the art world into the internationalized culture and the industrial production of cultural goods earmarked for an indeterminate public (the masses). This resulted in the collection *Les Arts de masse en question*. The authors start out essentially from the reflections of the philosopher Noel Carroll in his 1998 book *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, which considerably inspired the ideas of Roger Pouivet in his 2003 book *L'Œuvre d'art à l'âge de sa mondialisation*¹, which it would be nice to have the translation of one day. The two most simulating contributions are those by Jean-Pierre Cometti and Jacques Morizot. I cannot go into any detail here. Cometti has the merit of linking the use of the notion of mass art with social devices of recognition and evaluation—thus emphasizing the pragmatic dimension of concepts instead of reifying rudimentary ontological categories. As for Morizot, in an extremely penetrating contribution, he articulates ontological reflection (the manner of existence of artworks) with the

technological situation (production methods and techniques), sociological conditions (conditions of production and reception in the various art worlds) and strategy (the pragmatic dimension of Cometti): “[...] in mass art, the impulse for a change in ontology is an outcome of transformations in the physiognomy of our culture [...]; on the other hand, the ontological speculation applied to the productions of contemporary art consists in a re-interpretation of the definitional coordinates which set the extension of the concept of art.” (pp. 73-74). This interpretation nevertheless remains deeply formalist and “Duchampian” and, if we challenge it, all that remains is mass arts. When the “either /or” falls, there remains an aestheticized world, and one that is art-free.

- 7 Let us forge on, then, with neither remorse nor nostalgia for the tourist foray to the next biennial!
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NOTES

1. For more details on the book, see *Critique d'art*, #22, p. 34.